

This listing was renamed HALIFAX HISTORIC DISTRICT by NPS after it was listed. It was N.C.'s first NR listing (1/21/1970) not counting the NHLs automatically listed in 1966.

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina	
COUNTY: Halifax	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME	
COMMON: Historic Halifax State Historic Site	
AND/OR HISTORIC: Halifax	

2. LOCATION			
STREET AND NUMBER: Enclosed within an area bounded on the southwest by St. David Street, on the northwest by the Owens House Drainage Ditch, on the northeast by the Roanoke River, and on the southeast by the Magazine Spring Gut.			
Halifax			
STATE North Carolina	CODE 32	COUNTY: Halifax	CODE 42

3. CLASSIFICATION			
CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY	
OWNER'S NAME: State of North Carolina--Administered by State Department of Archives and History	
STREET AND NUMBER: 109 East Jones Street	
CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh	STATE: North Carolina

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION	
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Register of Deeds, Halifax County Courthouse	
STREET AND NUMBER: _____	
CITY OR TOWN: Halifax	STATE: North Carolina

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS	
TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey	
DATE OF SURVEY: 1940 and 1961 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress	
STREET AND NUMBER: East Capital and Independence Avenue, S.E.	
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia

STATE: North Carolina	COUNTY: Halifax	ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Geography dictated both the location and the town plan of Halifax. The town was located near the head of navigation of the Roanoke River, a few miles below the fall line at the junctions of north-south and east-west transportation routes, and on the outside of a bend in the Roanoke River on the top of a steep bank, accessible to the water, yet secure from flooding. The town site is level, and is drained by deep ravines to the northwest and southeast, which provided convenient "ways" to the waterfront. These ravines dictated that the town grid established in 1758 would be perpendicular to the river. Three streets were laid off on an northeast-southwest axis. Seven north-south streets divided the town into seven columns of squares approximately 340' x 400'. Each square was composed of six lots, 133' x 170'.

During its period of importance, the town of Halifax had a number of public buildings, a dozen taverns, and more than sixty major dwelling houses. During the Federal period Halifax declined as a political and economic center, and the town site was progressively abandoned in the ante-bellum period leaving the structures in the district to deterioration.

Today, almost all structures important in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Halifax have been totally obliterated above ground. Several private residences stand in the district, but these are non-historical and are being removed from the site as it is being developed by the State of North Carolina. About half of the old town site is maintained as lawn, and the remainder is overgrown by pine forest or brush. The four structures that survive in the district from the historical period are:

1. The Constitution House, ca. 1770, is a one and one-half story, frame structure measuring 28'9" x 28'2" with two rooms, a side hall, and a rear porch on the first floor and one room and small hallway on the second floor. Two American-bond brick chimneys are on the west end of the exterior. All architectural details and trim are plain. The structure has been restored several times in its history.

2. The Owens House, ca. 1760, is a two-story, gambrel roof, frame house measuring 28' x 32' with two rooms and an end hall on the first floor. Two brick chimneys, one in Flemish-bond and the other in American-bond, are on the north end of the structure. The house has small shed porches on the front and rear. A full cellar is under the building. The exterior restoration of the structure was completed in 1969.

3. The Clerk's Office, ca. 1832, is a Gothic-Revival, one-story, Flemish-bond brick building measuring 28' x 32' with three unconnected rooms each having an exterior entrance. The structure has a plastered cove cornice and originally had a tin roof. The building has two interior chimneys with simple mantels and other plain architectural details. The four exterior doors are board-and-batten with strap hinges and board-and-batten shutters are on the windows.

4. The Jail, ca. 1838, is a two-story, American-bond, brick building measuring 30' x 30' with an interior stove flue and one exterior batten door. The building has a corbelled brick cornice and a slate roof is known to have originally been on the structure. Archaeology has revealed that the first floor interior originally contained a center cell block with four cells with a surrounding ditch covered by a wooden walk.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian | ☐ 16th Century | ☒ 18th Century | ☐ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century | ☐ 17th Century | ☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Colonial Halifax was an important political, social, and economic center in northeastern North Carolina. Chartered by the General Assembly in 1757, Halifax was one of the "new towns," joining Wilmington, Hillsborough, Salisbury, Salem, and Charlotte as centers of settlement for the rapidly growing and expanding population of the province. The influx of new settlers into Edgecombe and surrounding counties made it essential that new trading towns be established. Located at the junction of the Roanoke River with an important overland route from Edenton and Virginia, Halifax was admirably suited as a commercial center.

Although many families had lived on the site of Halifax from as early as the year 1741, the town had its official genesis on November 21, 1757, when the General Assembly, meeting in New Bern, passed an act which called for the establishment of a "town on the land of James Leslie, on Roanoke River." Five Trustees--Thomas Baker, Alexander McCulloch, John Gibson, Richard Brownrigg, and Robert Jones--were appointed to design and plan a town on one-hundred acres of Leslie's land. In June, 1758, a public sale conducted by the trustees resulted in the purchase of almost all the lots by forty-nine buyers. The new town was named Halifax in honor of Charles Montague, Earl of Halifax, and president of the Board of Trade. As was so often the custom, streets laid out in the town were given the names of honored British leaders and patron saints.

After the initial sale of town lots, the growth and importance of Halifax accelerated rapidly. In 1758, the General Assembly passed an act to change the place for holding the Supreme Court of Justice, Oyer and Terminer, and General Gaol Delivery for the district of Northampton, Edgecombe, and Granville counties from Enfield to Halifax. This decision was made to provide a more central location for holding the district court, and also due to a lack of proper accommodations and entertainment in Enfield. The town was again honored in 1759, when it was designated as the seat of government for the new County of Halifax which was formed by the division of Edgecombe County. The rapid growth of Halifax was recognized in 1760, when the General Assembly allowed the town to incorporate, a privilege extended to towns of sixty or more families. Incorporation made Halifax a "borough town," allowing it to send a representative to sit in the House of Commons. Thus, in its early years of growth, Halifax became the focal point of judicial, political, and commercial activity on the Roanoke, and achieved a place of distinction among the chief town of the colony.

In his map of Halifax, drawn in 1769, Claude Joseph Sauthier, cartographer for His Royal Majesty King George III, depicted a well-defined colonial town, complete with a courthouse, gaol, stores, a playhouse, and private

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8. dwellings. In a little over ten years from its founding, Halifax had made its mark on North Carolina as a leading urban center for the trading of overland and river-borne goods. Tobacco, an ever important commodity in North Carolina, was stored in the many warehouses in the town to await shipment down the Roanoke to coastal ports. As trade flourished so did other aspects of the town's life. It vied with Edenton as a social center, Halifax's society being described as among the most polished and cultivated in the Colony. Parties and balls were frequent events, and the inns and taverns of the town were well patronized.

Men of distinction made their residences in Halifax, in its early years of growth. Among the settlers of note were Joseph Montford, Alexander McCulloch, Stephen Dewey, Abner Nash, Willie Jones, Robert A. Jones, and Robert Potter. Each of these men held a high place in the history of the Colony and led Halifax into the momentous era of the American Revolution.

The growing desire for independence in North Carolina provided the background for the two events for which the town of Halifax is most significant, the adoption of the "Halifax Resolves" and the drafting of North Carolina's First Constitution. On April 4, 1776, the Fourth Provincial Congress met in Halifax with 148 delegates present from 34 counties and 8 towns. The Congress had one essential purpose "to take into consideration the usurpations and violences attempted and committed by the King and Parliament against America."

On April 12, 1776, the Congress adopted the "Halifax Resolves" which were "the first authoritative, explicit declaration, by more than a month, by any colony in favor of full, and final separation from Great Britain." The "Resolves" were not only a declaration for North Carolina alone, but a recommendation to the Continental Congress meeting at the time in Philadelphia that independence should be declared by all the Colonies, and by the Continental Congress as their agent.

On August 1, 1776, the official proclamation of the Declaration of Independence was made at the courthouse in Halifax. The initial organization of the State Government ensued in the same structure. On November 22, 1776, the Fifth Provincial Congress of North Carolina met in the courthouse in Halifax and appointed a committee to draw up a Bill of Rights and a Constitution for the state. The delegates completed their task on December 18, 1776, with the adoption of the document.

During the years of the American Revolution, Halifax continued in the position of leading urban center for the State of North Carolina, and its citizens played a major role in the growth of the new state. Following the Revolutionary War Era, however, Halifax gradually declined as a center of political and commercial activity. As the population of the state shifted westward, Halifax rapidly lost its position of primacy. Agriculture declined in the region, transportation routes changed, and the population of the town began to dwindle. Even President Washington noted the declining condition of the town of Halifax in his diary of 1791. Halifax deteriorated entirely in the ante-bellum period as the town center moved westward to meet the railroad in the 1830s and 1840s.

The development of the Halifax Historic District as a state historic site is offering an excellent opportunity to examine cultural process through historical archaeology. Despite its small size, Halifax was the

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8. state's largest "urban" center in 1800, and was representative of a dozen other North Carolina villages that functioned as regional commercial and political centers. Of particular importance for the analysis is the relative stability of Halifax for its first eighty years. It will be possible to interpret changes in material culture as changes taking place within stable is evolving system, rather than changes imposed by shifts in function or population. After 1840 this will no longer be true. It is hoped that the artifacts recovered from the early Victorian era will be adequate to continue tracing stylistic changes into this period.

The four extant structures in the Historic Halifax District are significant as follows:

1. The Constitution House, ca. 1770, is reputed to be the structure where the committee drafted the First Constitution for North Carolina during the months of November and December, 1776.

2. The Owens House, ca. 1760, is an excellent example of a gambrel-roofed house of the eighteenth century. The structure was originally the residence of George W. Owens, one of the prominent Halifax merchants.

3. The Clerk's Office, ca. 1832, according to Waterman, possesses one of the few plaster cove cornices used in the South in Romantic Revival Style buildings. The structure is one of the first constructed for the preservation and protection of public records in North Carolina. The concern resulted from the burning of the State Capitol building in Raleigh in 1832.

4. The Jail, ca. 1838, is significant as one of the few public structures of this type remaining in North Carolina.

Halifax has more recently become known among architectural historians as the center of the finest examples of Palladian Farmhouse architecture in the United States.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Allen, W. C., History of Halifax (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1918)

Clark, Walter (ed.), The State Records of North Carolina (Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 16 volumes, numbered XI-XXX, 1895-1914), XI-XXVI, passim.

Corbitt, David Leroy, The Formation of the North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943 (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1950), 114-115.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	36 ° 20 ' 13 "	77 ° 35 ' 30 "		°	'	"
NE	36 ° 20 ' 13 "	77 ° 35 ' 02 "		°	'	"
SE	36 ° 19 ' 40 "	77 ° 35 ' 02 "				
SW	36 ° 19 ' 40 "	77 ° 35 ' 30 "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Fifty

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:	
Raymond F. Pisney, Assistant Administrator, Historic Sites and Museums	
ORGANIZATION	DATE
State Department of Archives and History	12/17/69
STREET AND NUMBER:	
109 East Jones Street	
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE
Raleigh	North Carolina
	CODE
	32

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☒ State ☐ Local ☐

Name H. G. Jones
H. G. Jones, Director
State Department of Archives
Title and History

Date December 18, 1969

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

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STATE North Carolina	
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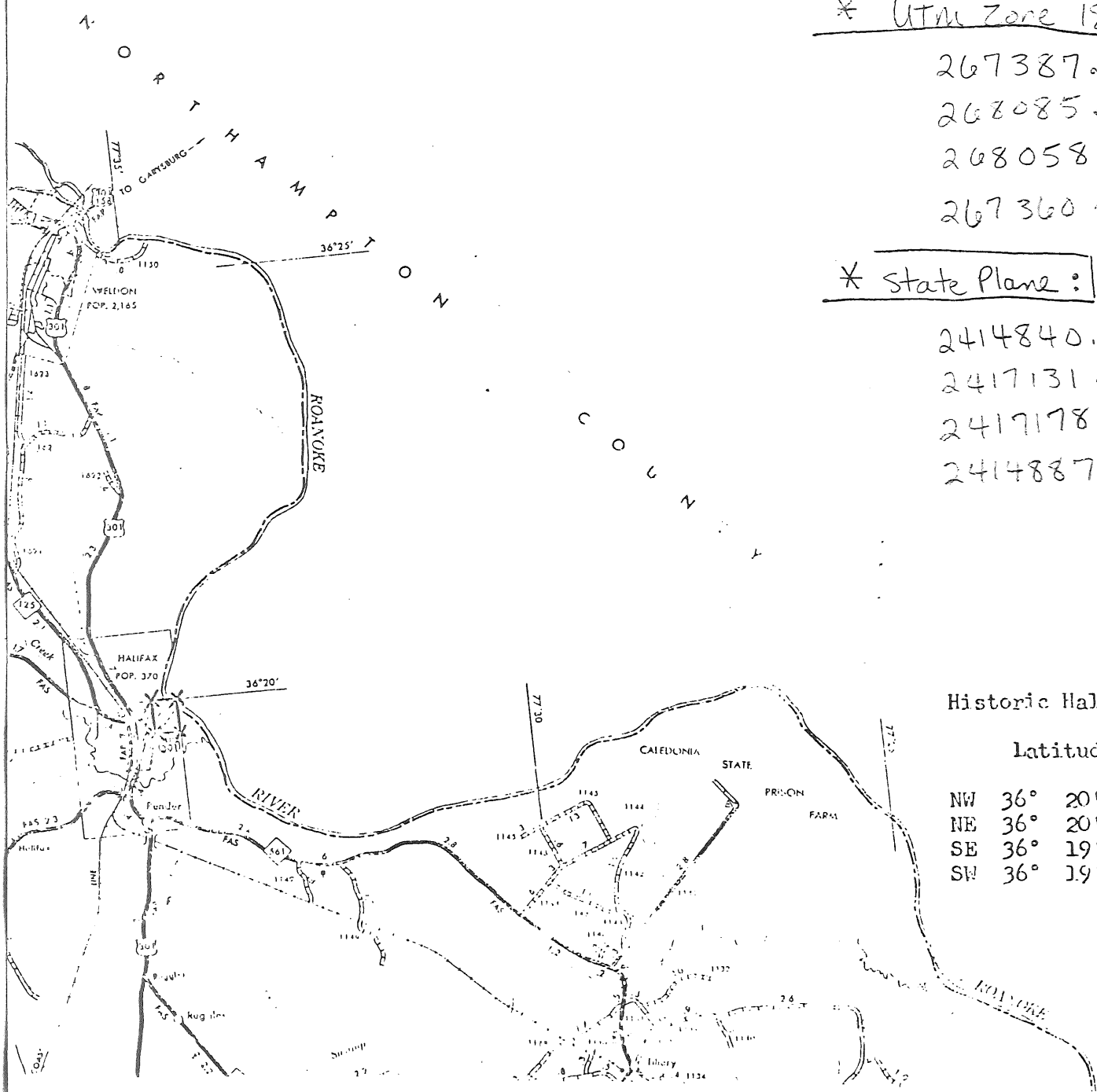
(Number all entries)

9. Halifax County Records, Halifax County Courthouse, Halifax, North Carolina. Office of the Register of Deeds. (Sub-groups: Deeds, Wills, Estate Papers, Inventories)

Halifax County Records, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Sub-groups: Deeds, Wills, Estate Papers, and Census Records)

Saunders, William (ed.), The Colonial Records of North Carolina (Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 10 volumes, 1886-1890), V-X, passim.

Sauthier, Claude J., Plan of the Town of Halifax . . . Surveyed and Drawn, June, 1769. (London: The British Museum)



* Utm Zone 18:

267387.5103
 268085.7394
 268058.5462
 267360.2351

4024238.6459
 4024219.9471
 4023202.8877
 4023221.5845

* State Plane:

2414840.1387
 2417131.0141
 2417178.6196
 2414887.4828

944479.8146
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 941175.4600
 941142.8639

Historic Halifax State Historic Site

	Latitude			Longitude		
NW	36°	20'	13"	77°	35'	30"
NE	36°	20'	13"	77°	35'	02"
SE	36°	19'	40"	77°	35'	02"
SW	36°	19'	40"	77°	35'	30"